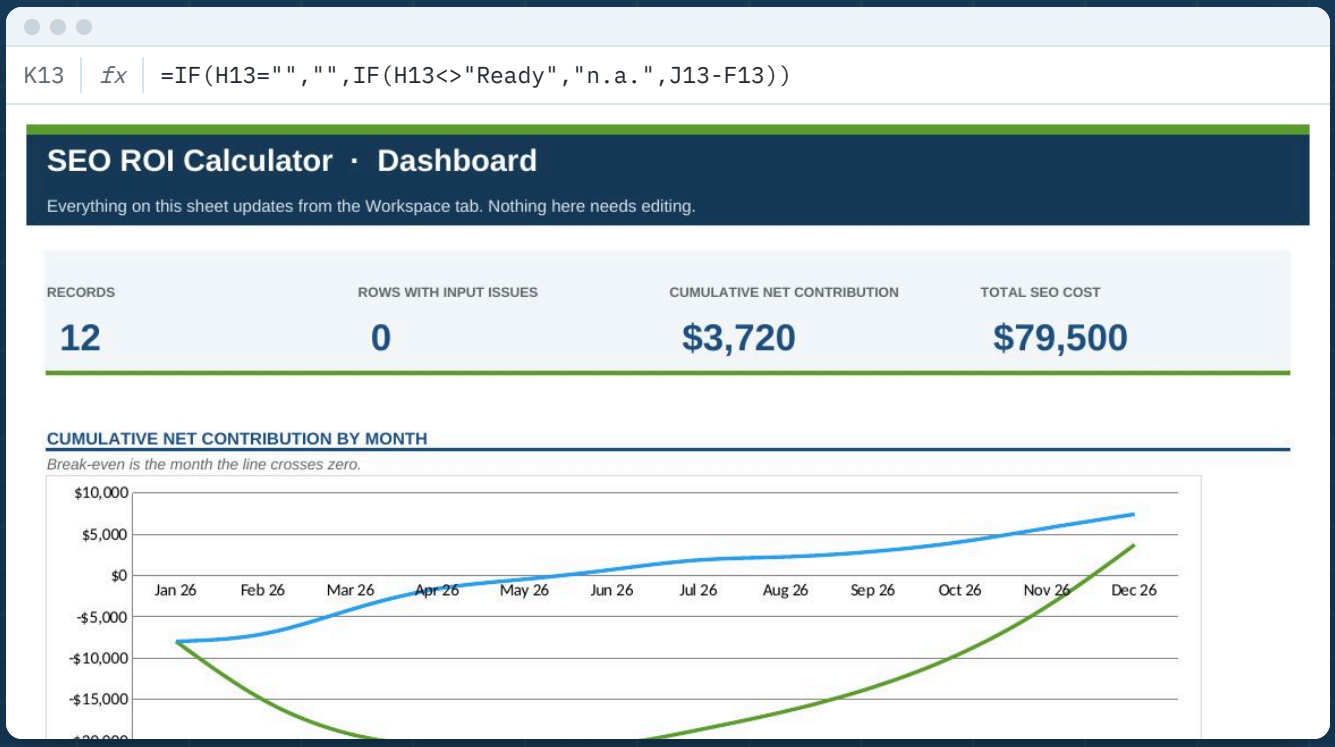
OptimizationTheory.com

SEO Business & Delivery Toolkit, resource 32

SEO ROI Calculator

Turn incremental sessions into revenue, contribution, net return and a break-even month against real SEO costs.

Built for the DataForSEO API: Labs: Ranked Keywords



Field guide, v3.0, November 2026

Jourdan Rombough, optimizationtheory.com

What this template decides

Whether SEO is paying back, by month and cumulatively, after real costs, and when it broke even.

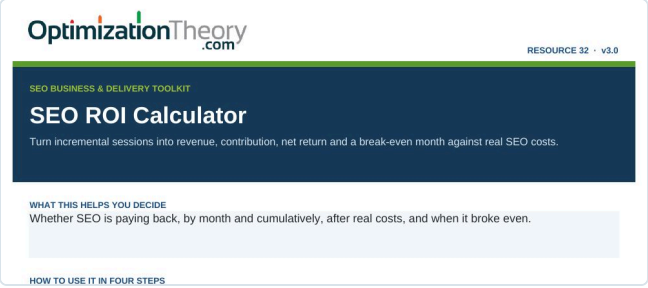
'What's the ROI of SEO?' is usually answered with traffic charts. Traffic isn't return. Return is incremental contribution minus what you spent to earn it, and SEO's shape matters: costs come first, gains compound later.

This SEO ROI calculator records incremental sessions, conversion rate, average order value, contribution margin and SEO cost for each month. It calculates incremental revenue, contribution, net after cost, monthly ROI and a cumulative net line that shows the break-even month on the Dashboard chart.

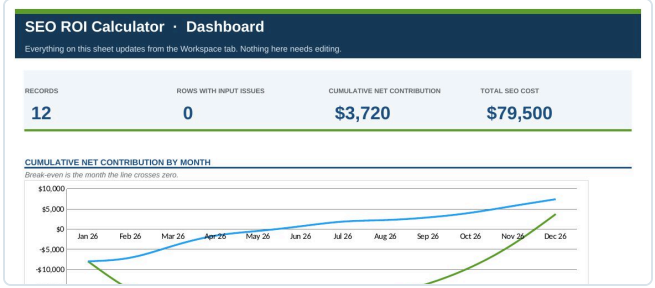
Who it's for

- SEO leads reporting to finance or leadership
- Agencies proving the value of a retainer
- Founders deciding whether to keep investing in SEO
- Analysts comparing channels on contribution

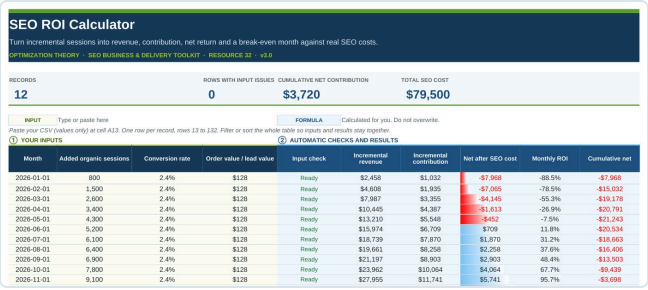
What's in the workbook



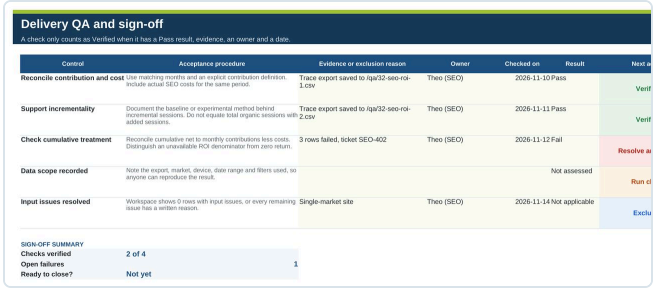
Start Here. Purpose, four-step setup and colour key.



Dashboard. KPIs, charts, Top 10 and an automatic action list.



Workspace. The working table, room for 120 rows.



Delivery QA. Evidence, owner and date for each validation step.

How the calculation works

Revenue = sessions × conversion rate × AOV. Contribution = revenue × margin. Net = contribution – SEO cost. Monthly ROI = net ÷ cost. Cumulative net is the running total of net.

The key formula, as written in the workbook

```
=IF(H13="","",IF(H13<>"Ready","n.a.",J13-F13))
```

Result column	Plain-English formula	What it tells you
Incremental revenue	Added organic sessions × Conversion rate × Order value ÷ lead value	Modeled incremental revenue.
Incremental contribution	Incremental revenue × Contribution margin	Revenue after the stated variable-cost margin.
Net after SEO cost	Incremental contribution-SEO cost	Contribution minus monthly SEO cost.
Monthly ROI	IF(SEO cost=0,"n.a.",Net after SEO cost ÷ SEO cost)	Net contribution divided by SEO cost.
Cumulative net	SUM(running total of Net after SEO cost)	Running contribution net of costs in the displayed chronological row order.

How to use it, step by step

1

Estimate incremental sessions

Sessions above a baseline or control, not total organic sessions.

2

Add conversion and value

Use organic conversion rate, average order value and your contribution margin.

3

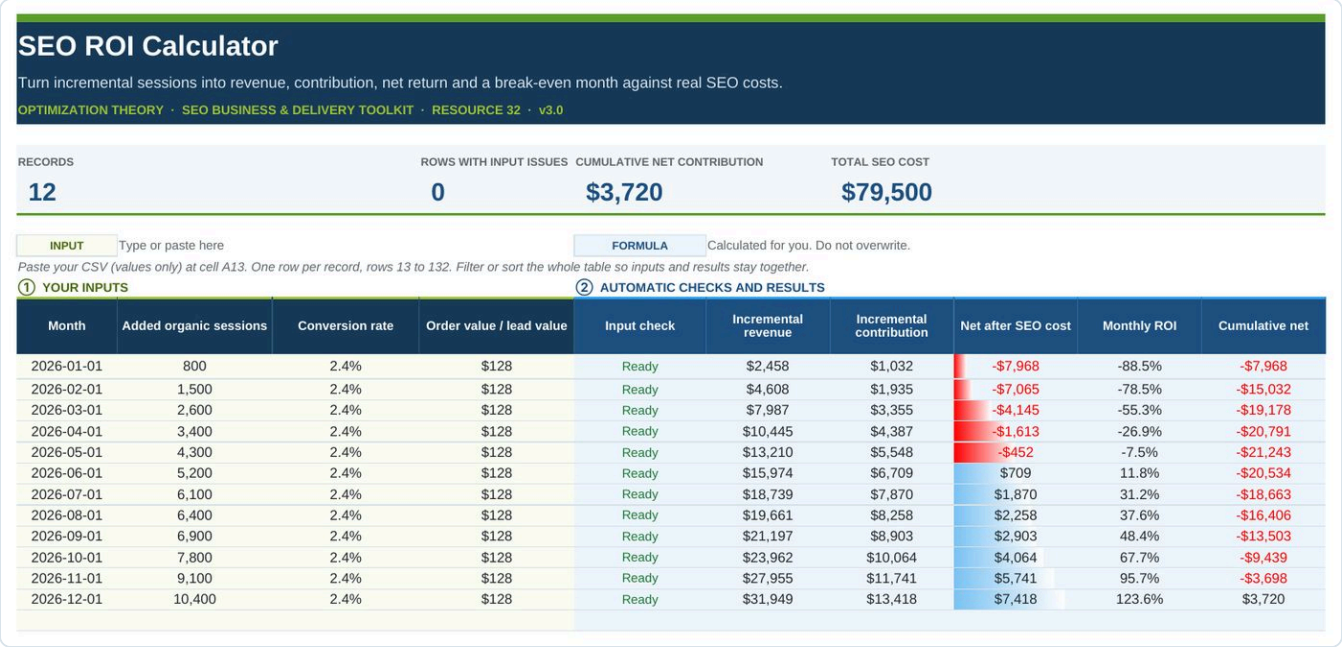
Enter real costs

Retainer, salaries share, content, tools and dev time spent on SEO, per month.

4

Read the cumulative line

The chart shows when cumulative net crosses zero: your payback month.



SEO ROI Calculator

Turn incremental sessions into revenue, contribution, net return and a break-even month against real SEO costs.

OPTIMIZATION THEORY · SEO BUSINESS & DELIVERY TOOLKIT · RESOURCE 32 · v3.0

RECORDS	ROWS WITH INPUT ISSUES	CUMULATIVE NET CONTRIBUTION	TOTAL SEO COST
12	0	$3,720	$79,500

INPUT Type or paste here — FORMULA Calculated for you. Do not overwrite.

Paste your CSV (values only) at cell A13. One row per record, rows 13 to 132. Filter or sort the whole table so inputs and results stay together.

① YOUR INPUTS — ② AUTOMATIC CHECKS AND RESULTS

Month	Added organic sessions	Conversion rate	Order value / lead value	Input check	Incremental revenue	Incremental contribution	Net after SEO cost	Monthly ROI	Cumulative net
2026-01-01	800	2.4%	$128	Ready	$2,458	$1,032	-$7,968	-88.5%	-$7,968
2026-02-01	1,500	2.4%	$128	Ready	$4,608	$1,935	-$7,065	-78.5%	-$15,032
2026-03-01	2,600	2.4%	$128	Ready	$7,987	$3,355	-$4,145	-55.3%	-$19,178
2026-04-01	3,400	2.4%	$128	Ready	$10,445	$4,387	-$1,613	-26.9%	-$20,791
2026-05-01	4,300	2.4%	$128	Ready	$13,210	$5,548	-$452	-7.5%	-$21,243
2026-06-01	5,200	2.4%	$128	Ready	$15,974	$6,709	$709	11.8%	-$20,534
2026-07-01	6,100	2.4%	$128	Ready	$18,739	$7,870	$1,870	31.2%	-$18,663
2026-08-01	6,400	2.4%	$128	Ready	$19,661	$8,258	$2,258	37.6%	-$16,406
2026-09-01	6,900	2.4%	$128	Ready	$21,197	$8,903	$2,903	48.4%	-$13,503
2026-10-01	7,800	2.4%	$128	Ready	$23,962	$10,064	$4,064	67.7%	-$9,439
2026-11-01	9,100	2.4%	$128	Ready	$27,955	$11,741	$5,741	95.7%	-$3,698
2026-12-01	10,400	2.4%	$128	Ready	$31,949	$13,418	$7,418	123.6%	$3,720

The Workspace tab with the worked example. Lime cells are inputs; blue cells are formulas.

Fill it with DataForSEO

This template is built to run on **DataForSEO Labs: Ranked Keywords**: every keyword a domain ranks for, with its ranking URL, position and volume.

DataForSEO supplies the URL or query list and the audit trail; you add the measurements listed below.

1. Request the data

```
POST https://api.dataforseo.com/v3/dataforseo_labs/google/ranked_keywords/live
[
  {
    "target": "yourdomain.com",
    "location_code": 2840,
    "language_code": "en",
    "limit": 1000
  }
]
```

2. Save the full JSON response

Save the complete response, not just the task ID, next to the template folder.

3. Convert it to the input CSV

The script in the Automation folder runs offline: no API call, no credentials.

```
python3 Automation/dataforseo_import.py import --template 32 --input response.json --output my-inputs.csv
```

Fills automatically	You add
Source reference (audit trail)	Month, Added organic sessions, Conversion rate, Order value / lead value, Contribution margin, SEO cost

Source reference fills automatically with the task ID, endpoint, location, language, device and snapshot time, so every row is traceable. Paste the finished CSV at Workspace cell A13. Estimate the cost first with the DataForSEO Cost Calculator (template 38).

Input dictionary

Keep the CSV columns in this order and paste values at Workspace cell A13. A missing observation stays blank; use 0 only for a measured zero or a verified No.

CSV field	Column	Meaning and rule	Typical source
`month`	Month	First day of the reporting month. Keep rows chronological.	Your records or manual review
`incremental_sessions`	Added organic sessions	Incremental sessions under your documented baseline model.	Your records or manual review
`conversion_rate`	Conversion rate	Conversions divided by eligible organic sessions for the same segment. This is an assumption. Decimal, 0.08 = 8%.	Your records or manual review
`average_order_value`	Order value / lead value	USD revenue per order or expected revenue per lead.	Your records or manual review
`contribution_margin`	Contribution margin	Revenue share remaining after variable fulfillment and selling costs. Decimal, 0.08 = 8%.	Your records or manual review
`seo_cost`	SEO cost	Monthly agency, labor, tools and allocated production cost in USD.	Your records or manual review
`source_ref`	Source reference	Task ID, export filename and observation scope. Retain the untouched source response separately. Optional.	DataForSEO: source_ref

The worked example

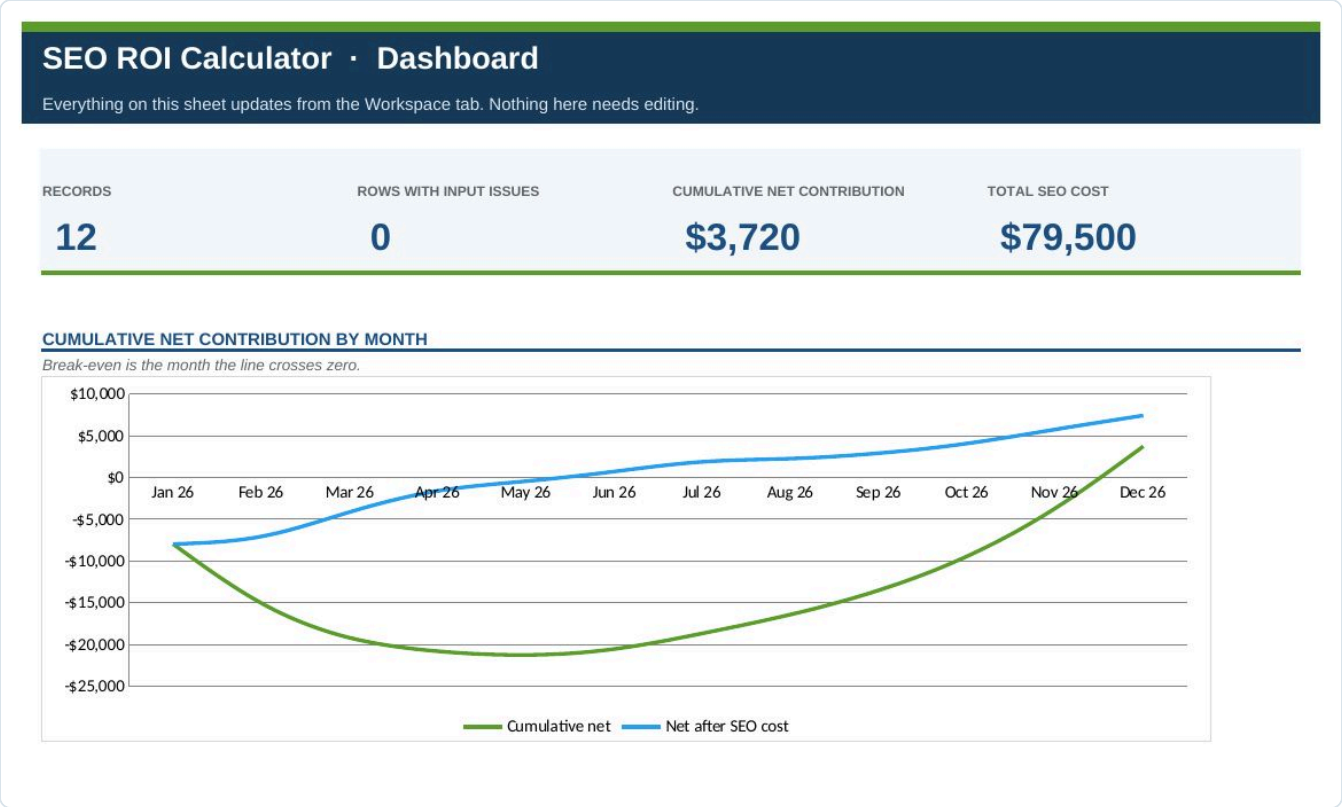
Every workbook ships filled with data from Northbeam Outdoor, a fictional outdoor-gear retailer. This one has 12 example rows.

12	0	$3,720	$79,500
Records	Rows with input issues	Cumulative net contribution	Total SEO cost

The example program loses money every month until June, and the cumulative line only crosses zero in December. That J-curve is normal for SEO, and the chart makes it impossible to miss.

Top 10 by net after SEO cost

#	Month	Net after SEO cost
1	Dec 2026	$7,418
2	Nov 2026	$5,741
3	Oct 2026	$4,064
4	Sep 2026	$2,903
5	Aug 2026	$2,258



The Dashboard updates automatically from the Workspace tab.

Reading the result honestly

Revenue ROI overstates the return when variable costs are material. Use contribution for the investment comparison.

Limits. Private outcomes come from analytics and finance. Ranked-keyword data is supporting visibility evidence, not incremental sessions.

Mistakes to avoid

Counting all organic traffic as incremental. Use the lift over a baseline, or your ROI is wildly overstated.

Using revenue instead of contribution. ROI on revenue ignores product costs. Use margin.

Judging SEO on month-one ROI. SEO front-loads cost. Judge on the cumulative line over 12 months or more.

Tips from the field

Use the SEO split test calculator or post-migration monitor to estimate incremental sessions credibly.

Compare against the forecast template to calibrate future forecasts.

Report cumulative net to leadership; it tells the whole story in one line.

Questions people ask

How do you calculate SEO ROI?

(Incremental contribution from organic search – SEO cost) ÷ SEO cost. Contribution is revenue multiplied by your margin.

What is a good ROI for SEO?

It depends on margins and time frame. Many programs are negative early and strongly positive after 12 to 24 months.

How long does SEO take to pay back?

Often six to twelve months, longer in competitive markets. The cumulative chart shows your actual payback month.

What costs should I include?

Everything spent on SEO: agency or consultant fees, staff time, content, tools and development work.

Templates that work well with this one

SEO Forecast Template

Project added clicks and contribution per keyword cluster with CTR, attainment and seasonality you can defend.

SEO Split Test Calculator

Estimate ratio-adjusted lift and difference-in-differences against matched control pages, with a pre-trend check.

AI Referral Traffic Tracker

Measure sessions, conversion rate and contribution per session from ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini, Copilot and Claude.

SEO Roadmap Template

Sequence 90 days of SEO and GEO work by weighted opportunity per hour, dependencies and acceptance criteria.

Post-Migration SEO Monitoring Template

Compare each migrated segment with an untouched control so you can tell real migration loss from seasonality.

Ecommerce SEO Prioritization Template

Rank product pages by potential orders, unit contribution and profit per hour, and catch out-of-stock or noindex SKUs.

Read the full tutorial online: **optimizationtheory.com/download-view/seo-roi-calculator/**
Get all six templates in the **SEO Business & Delivery Toolkit**, or all 40 in the **Complete SEO & GEO Toolkit**.