

A FIELD GUIDE FOR DIRECTORY OPERATORS

The Three-Document Foundation

A simple framework for planning any Brilliant Directories site with Claude AI.

Courtesy of Gerald Griffith

The Vending Club · thevendingclub.net

WHAT THIS GUIDE IS

A starting point for serious directory operators

If you own a Brilliant Directories site and you've been wondering how to use Claude AI to actually move your platform forward, this guide gives you the simplest possible starting point: **three documents, produced in order, that together form the strategic foundation for everything else you'll do.**

You produce these documents *before* you connect any tools, *before* you write your first AI-assisted blog post, *before* you touch a single setting in your BD admin panel. They take a focused day or two to create. Once they exist, every later prompt you give Claude — whether about content, configuration, marketing, or partnerships — references them. That's what turns generic AI assistance into a coherent build effort.

This guide covers only the strategic foundation. Everything that comes after it — connecting Claude to your BD site, executing the plan, automating tasks — is its own topic for a separate guide.

THE BIG PICTURE

Three documents, produced in sequence

Each document builds on the one before it. The order is not optional — and you'll see why on the next page.



BEFORE YOU START

Set up a Project in Claude

In `claude.ai`, create a **Project** and name it after your platform. Everything you do — chats, documents, uploaded files — goes inside that project.

Why this matters: Claude can search across your project's documents when you ask later questions, which is what allows each document to know about the previous ones. Without a project, you're starting from scratch every conversation.

INSIDE YOUR CLAUDE PROJECT — "[YOUR CONTENT NAME HERE]"

Document 1 — Site Audit
Document 2 — Competitive Analysis
Document 3 — Implementation Plan

Plus any reference files, prior research, or notes you upload.

A few practical tips before you begin

Treat each document as a draft you'll iterate on, not a one-shot output. Claude's first pass at any of these is a starting point — the value comes from reading carefully, pushing back on anything that feels generic or wrong, and asking for revisions. The platforms that struggle with AI assistance are usually the ones that accept the first draft. The ones that thrive treat Claude as a smart collaborator whose work needs editorial review.

Plan to spend two focused sessions on this — one for the audit, one for the analysis and plan together. Don't try to do all three in a single sitting. Sleeping on the audit before tackling the competitive analysis lets your own judgment catch up with what Claude found. The downstream documents are noticeably sharper when they aren't rushed.

Finally, keep your scope honest. This guide is about the foundation, not the build. You won't have a finished platform after these three documents — you'll have a clear, defensible plan to build one. That's the deliverable.

STEP 1

The Site Audit

What it is

A specific, prioritized list of every issue currently visible on your live site — broken title tags, placeholder content, empty sections, missing schema markup, unclaimed SEO opportunities. Sorted into **Critical**, **High Priority**, and **Growth** tiers so you know what to fix first.

Why this comes first

You can't decide where to compete or how to grow until you know what's actually broken on your own site. The audit gives you a concrete list of problems, which becomes the raw material for everything that follows.

The prompt to use

Paste this into a new chat inside your Claude project. Replace the bolded part with your own platform name and site URL.

Perform a full SEO and growth-strategy audit on **[YOUR CONTENT NAME HERE]** at **[yoursite.com]**. Cover technical SEO, keyword strategy, content strategy, community/platform features, competitive landscape, backlink and authority building, monetization model, and a 12-month implementation roadmap. End with a prioritized list of top actions.

What to do with the result

Save Claude's response as a PDF or formatted document. Upload it to your project so later prompts can reference it. Read it carefully and push back on anything that doesn't ring true — Claude can occasionally misread the live site, and your knowledge of your own platform is more reliable than its first impression.

STEP 2

The Competitive Analysis

What it is

A map of your industry organized into tiers — direct competitors, potential partners, adjacent platforms, content creators, trade associations, regional players. For each, an explicit position: **do we compete with them, partner with them, or ignore them?**

Why this matters

This is where your **moat** gets formalized. Most directory operators never write down what makes their platform structurally different. Once it's on paper, every later decision becomes easier — pricing, partnerships, feature priorities, marketing voice. They all flow from the moat.

COMMON MOAT TYPES FOR DIRECTORY PLATFORMS

- Neutrality — independent, no industry conflicts of interest
- Breadth — serve more sides of the market in one place
- Price accessibility — reach the long tail of operators
- Digital-native UX — modern interface vs. legacy directories
- Community depth — the place people return to, not just visit
- Content authority — original data, original IP, original takes

You don't pick from this list directly. Claude will research your industry and propose a moat based on what it finds. Your job is to validate, sharpen, or reject what Claude proposes until the moat genuinely captures your strategic position.

The prompt to use

Create a competitive analysis for **[YOUR CONTENT NAME HERE]** highlighting opportunities for market dominance as the go-to resource platform for the **[YOUR INDUSTRY]** services industry. Include information about competitors, potential partners, and any other opportunities to position **[YOUR CONTENT NAME HERE]** as a central resource in the industry and where members of the **[YOUR INDUSTRY]** want to have, and maintain, a presence.

What to do with the result

Claude will do web research on your industry, identify competitors and partners (often including ones you didn't know about), and produce a polished analysis — typically as a Word document. Save it to your project, then read it carefully. If the proposed moat doesn't feel right, push back: tell Claude which parts feel off and have it revise. The goal is a document that captures something true and defensible about your platform's position. **If you can't articulate the moat clearly after this step, the rest of the build will struggle.**

STEP 3

The Implementation Plan

What it is

A detailed, step-by-step execution plan that translates everything in the audit and competitive analysis into specific tasks inside the BD admin panel. Phases, checklists, exact admin paths, time estimates, and a "how you know it's done" verification step for each phase.

It is written for a beginner. Every task spells out where to click, what to type, and how to confirm it worked.

Why this is the payoff document

Documents 1 and 2 tell you *what* to do and *why*. Document 3 tells you *how* and *in what order*. It's the document you'll actually open every working session for the next several months.

WHAT A TYPICAL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN COVERS

- Phase 1 — Critical fixes (Days 1–7)
- Phase 2 — SEO & trust (Days 8–30)
- Phase 3 — Membership structure
- Phase 4 — Directory enhancement
- Phase 5 — Content build
- Phase 6 — Major feature launches
- Phase 7 — Partnerships & outreach

Plus: ongoing operations, master timeline, master checklist, BD admin navigation guide.

The prompt to use

Using the audit and competitive analysis in this project, create a detailed implementation plan for my Brilliant Directories site **[YOUR CONTENT NAME HERE]** at **[yoursite.com]**. Explain this as if you are dealing with a beginner. Provide very detailed and clear instructions. Do not assume anything. This plan is for the overall platform and not limited to any single section. Review the current site and spell out the changes needed to bring it in-line with all of our work so far on positioning the platform for success as outlined in the audit report and competitive analysis. Be detailed with checklists and visuals as needed.

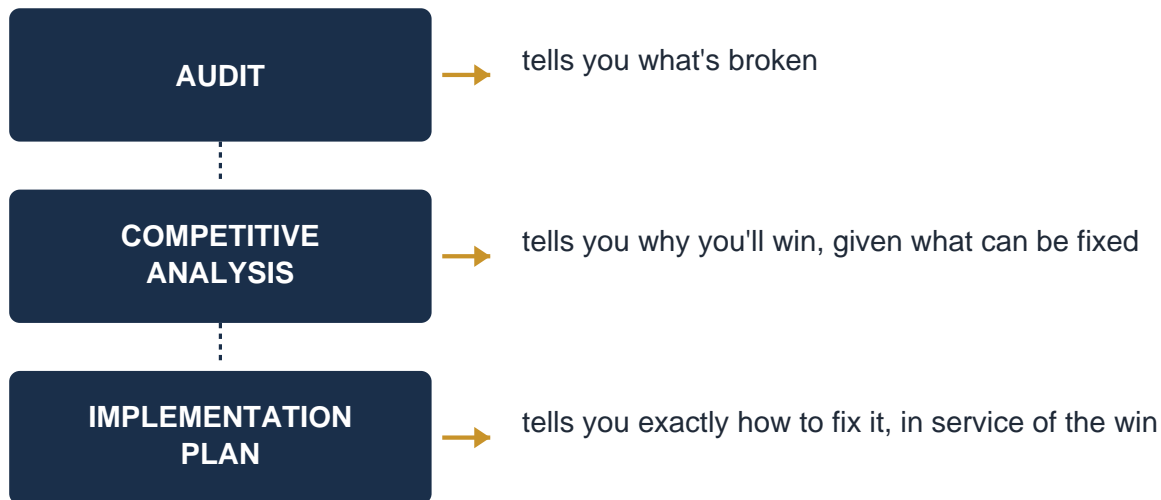
What to do with the result

Save the plan to your project. This becomes your master document. Every working session from here on opens with: "*Open the implementation plan and let's tackle [section X].*" Don't try to execute the whole plan at once — the plan exists to give you a clear next task at any moment, not to overwhelm you with everything at the same time.

THE LOGIC OF THE SEQUENCE

Why the order matters

The three documents have to be produced in this exact order. Here's why each step depends on the one before it:



If you skip the audit and start with the competitive analysis, the analysis is generic — Claude doesn't know what you can realistically improve. If you skip the competitive analysis and go straight to an implementation plan, you get a long list of tactics with no organizing strategy — every task is the same priority, which is the same as no priority. The order isn't optional.

CHECKPOINTS

What "done" looks like for each step

Step	You're done when...
Site Audit	You have a numbered list of issues, sorted by priority, saved in your project.
Competitive Analysis	You can state your platform's moat in one sentence and defend it without flinching.
Implementation Plan	You can open the plan, point to the next task, and start work without re-reading the whole document.

If you can hit all three of these checkpoints, you have a foundation that will carry the rest of your build.

WHAT COMES NEXT

After the foundation is built

Once these three documents exist, you have a strategic foundation. The next phase of the work — actually executing the plan, ideally with Claude connected to your BD site so it can make changes directly — is its own topic. That's a separate guide.

For now, focus on getting these three documents right. They are the highest-leverage few hours you'll spend on your platform this year.

QUICK REFERENCE

The whole guide on one page

Step	Document	Prompt starts with...	Output
1	Site Audit	<i>"Perform a full SEO and growth-strategy audit on..."</i>	Prioritized list of issues
2	Competitive Analysis	<i>"Create a competitive analysis for..."</i>	Moat + tiered competitor map
3	Implementation Plan	<i>"Using the audit and competitive analysis in this project..."</i>	Phased, beginner-friendly build plan

Three documents. One sequence. The strategic foundation for any Brilliant Directories platform.

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