BONUS

Week 5, With Real Data

Running your SEO Strategist on the DataForSEO API — and the one setting that will break it if you get it wrong

When to graduate, and the gotcha

In Week 5 I told you not to buy a paid tool until the free ones are what's slowing you down. That's still the rule. This guide is for the moment it happens.

YOU'VE OUTGROWN FREE WHEN

- [ ] You're doing this for **clients**, not just yourself — guessing doesn't survive a client asking "how do you know?"
- [ ] You want **real search volume for your city**, not a national number
- [ ] You want the **seasonality curve**, because when you publish matters as much as what
- [ ] You want it **on a schedule** instead of by hand every quarter

If none of those are true, close this guide and go fix three boxes on your Google Business Profile. That's still the higher-return work.

WHY DATAFORSEO RATHER THAN A SUBSCRIPTION TOOL

It's an **API, not an app.** There's no dashboard you pay $99/month for and log into twice. You load a prepaid balance and pay per request, so a quarterly keyword pull for one business costs a rounding error rather than a subscription.

Their published starting price for a Google SERP request is **$0.0006** — six hundredths of a cent. Keyword and Labs endpoints are priced differently, and "Live" mode costs more than queued modes. **Check dataforseo.com/pricing for current rates and the minimum top-up before you sign up** — the numbers move and I'm not going to quote you stale ones.

The trade: there's no interface. You need something to drive it, which is exactly what your SEO Strategist is for.

SETUP — ABOUT 15 MINUTES

1. Create an account at **dataforseo.com** and load the minimum balance
2. Copy your **API login and password** from the dashboard
3. Add the **DataForSEO connector** in Claude (or point your own agent at their MCP server)
4. Ask your SEO Strategist for 25 keywords and watch it come back with real numbers

Your API password is a password. Password manager only. Never in a chat transcript, never in a screen share, never in a webinar.

⚠ The gotcha that will break your first run

The endpoints do not all accept the same location format. Get this wrong and you'll either error out or — worse — silently get national data and think it's local.

Endpoint	Location format
Google Ads search volume	City works: `Greensboro,North Carolina,United States`
SERP (organic, People Also Ask)	City works: same hierarchical format
Business listings	Lat/long + radius in km: `36.0726,-79.7920,25`
Labs — keyword ideas, difficulty, ranked keywords	**COUNTRY ONLY.** `United States` . Not a city, not a region.

That last row is the one that gets people. Ask Labs for keyword ideas "in Greensboro" and it won't give you Greensboro — the endpoint doesn't do cities. **Use Google Ads volume for local numbers and Labs for everything else**, and put that rule in your SEO Strategist's job description so you never have to remember it.

What are they actually searching (for real)

This is Week 5's Segment 5, with the free methods swapped for data. Everything below is a **real pull for Greensboro, NC on October 16, 2026** — your numbers will differ, and these will have moved by the time you read this.

THE LOCAL NUMBERS ARE SMALL. THAT'S NORMAL.

Keyword	Greensboro	United States
furnace repair	**140**	201,000
furnace repair greensboro	**20**	—
why is my furnace blowing cold air	**10**	1,300
hvac replacement cost	**10**	—
emergency furnace repair	**10**	—
repair or replace furnace	**no data**	50

Twenty searches a month. That's the real number for "furnace repair greensboro," and this is where most people quit — twenty looks like nothing next to 201,000.

It isn't nothing. Twenty people in your city typed your service plus your city name into Google this month. Every one of them is deciding who to call. **If a furnace job is worth $400 and you win three of those twenty, that's the whole content program paid for.**

National volume is a vanity number for a local business. You cannot serve 201,000 people. You can serve twenty.

WHAT CPC TELLS YOU THAT VOLUME DOESN'T

"furnace repair" nationally: **CPC $27.45**, with a high top-of-page bid of **$75**.

Somebody is willingly paying twenty-seven dollars for one click on that term. That tells you what a lead is worth in this industry far better than any volume figure — and it tells you the free organic version of that click is worth chasing.

Read CPC as "what the market says a customer is worth." High CPC with low volume is often the best content target there is.

SEASONALITY CHANGES *WHEN* YOU PUBLISH ☆

This is the thing you cannot get from the free methods, and it's the best reason to pay.

"furnace repair," Greensboro, by month:

Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Jun	Jul	Sep
140	110	260	**320**	210	140	30	140	30

January is ten times June. Nationally the same keyword runs 450,000 in January against 110,000 in July.

So the instruction to your SEO Strategist isn't "rank for furnace repair." It's **publish furnace content in September, so it's indexed and ranking when January arrives.** Content takes three to six months to rank; the demand curve doesn't wait for you.

That one insight reorders the whole 90-day plan. Write the hot-weather content in spring and the cold-weather content in late summer. Everybody else writes about furnaces in January, which is exactly too late.

Intent, measured instead of guessed

Week 5 told you to group keywords into **ready to buy / researching / just curious** and rank the buyers first. DataForSEO will classify intent for you — but it uses four labels, not three, so here's the mapping.

DataForSEO says	Your bucket	What it means
transactional	Ready to buy	They want to do the thing now
commercial	Ready to buy	They're comparing who to hire
informational	Researching / curious	They want to understand something
navigational	Neither	They're looking for a specific brand — often yours or a competitor's

THE REAL CLASSIFICATIONS

Keyword	Intent	Confidence
repair or replace furnace	**transactional**	87%
furnace repair greensboro	**commercial**	52%
emergency furnace repair	commercial	43% *(low)*
trane vs carrier	informational	77%
why is my furnace blowing cold air	informational	92%
how does a heat pump work	**informational**	100%

Two of these should change how you think.

"Repair or replace furnace" reads like research. The data says **transactional, 87%** — somebody asking that question is about to spend money, they just don't know which way yet. That's a buying keyword wearing a research costume, and it's the single best kind of content target: high intent, low competition, and your competitors are all ignoring it to write about maintenance.

"How does a heat pump work" is **informational at 100% confidence.** No ambiguity. Lovely traffic, no customers. Write it for credibility, never expect a phone call.

READ THE CONFIDENCE NUMBER, NOT JUST THE LABEL

"Emergency furnace repair" came back commercial at only **43%**, with informational at 31% and transactional at 27% right behind it. That's the model saying *I'm not sure* — and it's right not to be, because that phrase gets typed by people with a dead furnace and by people idly wondering what it costs.

Treat anything under about 60% as unclassified and use your own judgment. A label with 43% confidence presented as fact is exactly the invented certainty your job description forbids.

The case worth studying

Remember the Week 3 blog post — *"should I repair or replace my furnace?"*

The data says: **no measurable volume in Greensboro. Fifty a month nationally. Transactional, 87%.**

Was it a bad topic? **No.** And understanding why is the whole lesson:

- Fifty searches a month nationally, split across the country, means low single digits in any one city — too small for the data to see
- But intent is 87% transactional, so the people who *do* search it are buyers
- And it's the exact question customers ask on the phone, which is why it was in Section 6 of the Handbook in the first place

Low volume plus high intent plus a real customer question is a good topic. The data didn't contradict the free method — it explained it. That's what you're paying for: not better topics, better reasons.

Competitors, listings, and AI answers

THE COMPETITOR GAP, WITH ACTUAL KEYWORDS

Week 5 had you read a competitor's website and make an educated guess. Now you can pull the real list:

- **Ranked keywords** — every term a domain actually ranks for, with position and volume
- **Competitors by domain** — who else ranks for the same things
- **Domain intersection** — what they rank for that you don't. This is the gap, as a list, not a guess.

The page-two play, automated. Week 5's best free trick was finding your own positions 11–20 in Search Console. Now you can do it for anyone: pull a competitor's ranked keywords, filter to positions 11–20, and you have a list of terms *they* are nearly ranking for. Those are the ones you can take with one good page.

Remember: Labs endpoints are **country-level only.** You'll get national positions, not Greensboro ones. For local rank, use the SERP endpoint with a city location.

And the Week 5 rule still stands: **learn from them, say nothing.** Having a spreadsheet of a competitor's keywords is not an invitation to post about it.

BUSINESS LISTINGS — THE GBP ANGLE

JourneyBuilder has no Google Business Profile API, so the audit in Week 5 stays a paste-and-ask job. But DataForSEO's **business listings** endpoint reads what's on Google Maps: name, address, contacts, rating, review count, hours, categories.

Point it at a lat/long and a radius and you get every HVAC company within 25km of you, with their ratings and review counts. Which gives you something genuinely useful:

Where you actually rank on reviews in your own town — and the review count you'd need to pass the business above you. That's a concrete, winnable goal instead of "get more reviews."

AI OVERVIEWS — A REAL ANSWER FOR THE AEO QUESTION ☆

In Week 5 I said nobody knows much about optimizing for AI answers yet, and that anyone selling you an AEO package is guessing. That's still broadly true — **but there's one thing you can now actually measure.**

The ranked-keywords endpoint takes an item type called `ai_overview_reference`. Which means you can ask: *which keywords is my site being cited for inside Google's AI Overviews?*

That's not a theory. That's a list. And it's the first piece of AEO that's measurable rather than speculative.

What to do with it: look at which of your pages get cited, notice what they have in common — usually a clear question answered plainly near the top — and write more like those. Which is the same boring advice as before, except now you can check whether it's working.

Still true: nobody has a complete playbook. **Newly true:** you can stop guessing about one part of it.

What stays free, forever

Paying for data doesn't replace any of this:

- **Your Google Business Profile.** Still free, still the highest-return twenty minutes, still mostly empty on your competitors' listings.
- **Your own Search Console.** Nobody has better data about your site than you do, and it costs nothing.
- **Section 6 of your Handbook.** The questions customers actually ask. No API knows your phone calls.
- **People Also Ask.** Right there on the page.

The data tells you how big and how urgent. It does not tell you what your customers ask you on the phone. You already knew that part, and it's still the better input.

Put the location rule and the confidence-threshold rule in your SEO Strategist's job description, and it will never make those two mistakes again. That's the whole point of hiring an employee instead of learning a tool.

Replays, all the skill files, and the rest of the series live in the community: **clients.journeybuilder.io** → Jay the AI Guy Community

Data in this guide pulled 16 October 2026 for Greensboro, NC and the United States. Search volumes and intent scores change — re-pull before you quote them to a client.