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Better *SEO Listicles* Start With a Clear *Methodology*

1 Why the Method Matters

The listicle gold rush is on.

Brands want **search visibility and AI recommendations**, but quality can get lost in the race.

Readers still need help choosing. A public methodology explains what qualified each option, how it was evaluated and why it earned its place, **including your own company.**



Why Transparency Matters

43.8%

of source URLs across **750 ChatGPT recommendation prompts** were "best X" blog lists.

SOURCE **Ahrefs**

~30%

of comparison pages in one AI-cited sample **ranked their publisher first.**

SOURCE **Scrunch**

3

recommendations from Google: **explain your choice, provide evidence and discuss benefits and drawbacks.**

SOURCE **Google Search Central**

2 Build the Method

Stage 1: Define What "Best" Means

An enterprise's best fit may be the wrong choice for a small team. **Start with a specific reader and decision.**

Audience
Who is choosing?

Use case
What do they need to accomplish?

Constraints
Which budgets, capabilities or requirements matter?

Scope
Which kinds of options belong in this comparison?

Stage 2: Establish What Qualifies an Option

Set clear inclusion requirements before comparing candidates. Each option should **meet the baseline requirements for the audience and use case.**

Relevance
How the option serves the article's audience and use case.

Capabilities
Which essential features or services qualify it.

Supporting evidence
Which verified information supports its inclusion.

Reader fit
Which needs, budgets or situations it suits.

Stage 3: Set Criteria Before Scoring

I choose criteria around **what matters to the reader**, then define what earns each score. The criteria and weights can change when the topic calls for a different comparison.

COMPARING	POSSIBLE CRITERIA
Software	Relevant features · Usability · Integrations · Total cost
Service providers	Relevant experience · Capacity · Security · Engagement model
Physical products	Performance · Durability · Usability · Value for money

3 Make the Comparison Defensible

Stage 4: Connect Claims to Evidence

≠ An advertised capability isn't proof of performance.

≠ Missing information isn't proof of poor quality.

✦ I always keep track of **sources, verification dates and research limitations.**

EVIDENCE TYPE	WHAT IT ESTABLISHES
Firsthand evaluation	What you directly tested or experienced
Third-party evidence	What external research, reviews or reporting supports
Provider information	What the company publicly claims
Editorial judgment	Your interpretation of the available evidence

Stage 5: Evaluate Your Company Consistently

If your company appears, **disclose the relationship and apply the same standards.** A methodology should allow different winners for different needs.

CHECK	EDITORIAL REQUIREMENT
☐	**Competitors** receive comparable research.
☐	**The same scoring definitions** apply to everyone.
☐	**Your company's limitations** are included.
☐	**Sponsorships, affiliations and other commercial interests** are disclosed.
☐	**The evidence can place another company first.**

4 Publish the Reasoning

Stage 6: Explain, Verify and Update

Publish a concise methodology within the listicle or link to a fuller explanation. **Show how the inclusion requirements and evaluation criteria shaped the recommendations.**

For each option, explain **who it suits, why it qualifies and where another choice may fit better.** Revisit the list when important evidence changes.

SHOW READERS	INCLUDE
How options qualify	Audience, scope and inclusion requirements
How options compare	Criteria, scoring definitions and weights, if used
What supports the claims	Sources, evaluation methods and verification dates
What could affect the result	Commercial interests, assumptions and research limitations

Before You Publish Your Listicle

- [ ] Is **"best" defined** for a specific reader?
- [ ] Is the **methodology public** and easy to find?
- [ ] Does the **evidence support** the recommendations?
- [ ] Are **trade-offs and commercial interests** visible?
- [ ] Are important **claims current and verified?**

Better SEO and AI Search Content *Helps People Choose*

I want a listicle to help someone make a decision. **Your company won't suit everyone.** Make the criteria, evidence and trade-offs clear so readers can judge what fits. That's a stronger foundation for useful SEO and AI search content.

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