

GUIDE BOOK

RUN THE 1-1 MATCH RECLAMATION PLAY



Guide

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Elena had been trying to get into Julian's architectural blog for nine months. Julian ran a respected niche publication. His resource pages were exactly the kind of placements her B2B clients needed. She tried the obvious move first: a polite guest-post pitch about interior design trends, written carefully, sent on a Tuesday morning. Julian deleted it in under a minute. The pitch had created work for him without giving him anything in return.

Then she ran a different play. She found a high-traffic resource page on his blog that was pointing to a dead server. She sent him a short, courteous note flagging the broken link, paired with a closely related, high-quality replacement her client had already published. Julian replied within four hours. He removed the dead link, inserted Elena's resource, and updated the page that afternoon. One placement. Zero negotiation. No editorial effort on his end.

That's the play this Guide teaches. It's called broken-link reclamation, and at scale, with one strict rule applied correctly, it converts at roughly 20%. Compare that to the 1% to 2% of cold guest-post outreach. The strict rule is the **1:1 Match Rule**, and it's the single difference between webmasters quietly ignoring your pitch and webmasters thanking you for the fix.

By the end of this Guide, you'll know how to:

- Find competitor pages that have died but still attract live citations from authoritative domains
- Vet those citations against four trust signals so you only pitch placements that actually move the needle
- Build a 1:1-matched replacement asset that webmasters cannot ignore
- Send a value-upfront pitch that lands as a free favour, not a request
- Turn one-off reclamations into a monthly rhythm that compounds without burning your team out

You don't need a research budget. You don't need a media list. You need a couple of competitor domains, an SEO tool that exposes broken-backlink reports, and a willingness to fix other people's problems before you ask for anything in return.

Why Broken-Link Reclamation Beats Cold Pitching

The web is decaying around you. 54% of Wikipedia pages contain at least one dead reference link, and 23% of news pages contain broken outbound links, per the 2024 Pew Research Center analysis of digital decay. Those numbers describe the most rigorously edited corners of the internet. Everywhere else is worse. Every minute, sites get reorganised, domains expire, and server migrations break old URLs.

When a publisher links to a resource, they're sending their audience to a destination they trust. When the destination vanishes, it creates a real problem on their site. Visitors click a promising reference and hit a 404. Search engines treat a high density of dead external links as a sign of a neglected page, the same way someone passing a vacant storefront with faded signage would assume the business has closed. The publisher's own rankings quietly erode. Fixing dead outbound links is on most editors' to-do lists. It's just permanently below something more urgent.

This is the asymmetry that makes the play work. Offering a clean 1:1 repair recasts the email entirely. You arrive as an auditor with a fix in hand, rather than as a solicitor asking for a favour. The webmaster gets a cleaner page, a small SEO win, and zero homework. You get the link, the placement, and a reason to be the first call next time something else breaks. Ahrefs' own

marketing team has profiled broken-link campaigns they've run on the Ahrefs blog, and similar case studies surface periodically from SEO teams at Wordable and Buffer, all reporting reply rates that climb into the 15% to 25% range once the 1:1 Match discipline is applied.

The numbers favour the play. Around 1%. That's the realistic floor for cold guest-post outreach against named industry outlets, based on Backlinko's analysis of more than 12 million outreach emails. The 1% to 3% range holds across most B2B benchmarks year after year. Reclamation pitches built around the 1:1 Match rule routinely clear 20%. The advantage is roughly tenfold. Run 100 well-vetted reclamation pitches and you should expect about 20 placements where cold outreach would return 2.

Two things changed in the AI-search era. AI tools still cite from indexed pages, so editors still link to authoritative sources. Earned authority hasn't lost its weight, only changed its surface area. Reclamation pitches in 2026 also sit in inboxes alongside a wall of AI-written outreach that misses the 1:1 Match. A precisely-matched human pitch is more obviously human than ever, and that visibility itself converts.

The Five-Step Target Discovery Process

Finding broken links efficiently means reverse-engineering your competitors' mistakes. Random scanning of industry blogs doesn't scale. Analysing the backlink profiles of your direct competitors does. When a competitor deletes an old guide, migrates a site badly, or shutsters a section, they leave behind dozens of inbound links pointing at dead URLs. Those inbound links are the conversations you want to have.

Step 1: Pull a competitor's broken-backlink report

Pick three competitors whose link profiles roughly match the one you want. Run each through Ahrefs, Semrush, or Moz. All three tools expose the same kind of report under different names. Look for "Broken Backlinks" or "Pages with 404 errors." This produces a list of the competitor's dead pages, sorted by the number of referring domains pointing at each one. All three tools require a paid subscription to surface competitor broken-link data; the 7-day Ahrefs Standard trial is the cheapest entry point if you don't already have access.

Step 2: Sort by referring domains, then by traffic

Ignore the pages with one or two backlinks. The targets that matter are the ones with 10 or more referring domains still pointing at them. A dead guide on commercial plumbing codes

with 50 inbound links is 50 targeted outreach prospects in a single line of a spreadsheet.

Step 3: Apply the four-criteria authority test

For each candidate referring domain, run the same authority test the Method uses in Phase 1. A link is worth chasing only if the linking domain has topical relevance to your space, the linking page receives consistent organic search traffic, the link sits inside the body content rather than the sidebar or footer, and the placement was made by a human editor rather than auto-generated. A broken link on a toxic Private Blog Network isn't worth reclaiming, no matter how prominent the domain looks on a DA scorecard.

Step 4: Confirm the error

Click the dead link yourself. Verify it actually returns a 404 and isn't just experiencing a temporary server timeout. 5 minutes of manual verification at this stage prevents wasted outreach later, and it catches the cases where a server is briefly down rather than truly dead.

Step 5: Read the dead page on the Wayback Machine

Open the Wayback Machine and look at what the dead page used to contain. Note its core arguments, its main data points, its tone, and its target reader. That snapshot is the brief for your replacement asset. Without it, you'll build something that looks

reasonable but fails the 1:1 Match Rule on a detail the webmaster cares about.

The 1:1 Match Rule: What Exact-Match Actually Means

This is the rule that decides whether reclamation lands at 20% or 1%. Most marketers approximate it. The webmasters know.

The 1:1 Match Rule states that your replacement asset must fulfil the same promise as the original dead page. If the original broken link pointed to a calculator for estimating bricklaying costs, you cannot offer a generic blog post about the history of masonry as a replacement. You have to build a better bricklaying calculator. The webmaster's audience reached the original link expecting a specific thing. Your job is to give them that thing.

The honest version of this rule is uncomfortable. You frequently have to build new content from scratch to win the swap. Reclamation is a high-conversion play that pairs real content investment with low-effort outreach. Calling it a shortcut around content work misreads what makes it convert.

Three patterns help you stay inside the rule.

Pattern A: Match the format, not just the topic

If the dead link is a calculator, build a calculator. If it's a downloadable PDF, produce a PDF. If it's a step-by-step guide, write a step-by-step guide. Webmasters scan format before content. A blog post about plumbing codes will fail as a

replacement for a plumbing-code reference sheet, even if the topic overlaps.

Pattern B: Match the depth, not just the title

Use the Wayback Machine to count the original's word length, section structure, and data depth. If the original was a 4,000-word reference guide with 12 sub-sections, your replacement needs to be in the same range. If the original was a 600-word checklist, don't send the editor a 4,000-word essay. Equivalence beats grandeur.

Pattern C: Match the audience, not just the angle

The dead page existed for a reason. Ask why the editor chose it in the first place. Was it the only resource at that depth? Was it written by a recognised expert? Was it free when most alternatives were gated? Whatever the editorial reason, your replacement has to satisfy it. A broken link on a real-estate-investor directory should be replaced by content useful to investors, not generic homebuyers.

When the format, depth, and audience all match, the webmaster's swap takes 10 seconds. That's the bar.

The Value-Upfront Pitch Template

Even the perfect replacement asset fails if your outreach reads like a transactional demand. The pitch has to feel like fixing a problem for the webmaster, not asking for a promotional favour.

Most outreach emails fail because they ask before they give. They demand attention, request the link, and only optionally offer value in return. The structure that wins runs in the opposite order. Lead with the free audit, mention the suggested replacement second, and keep the request out of the email entirely.

What goes in the email

A reclamation pitch has four short components in a strict order.

- 1. The flag.** Open by naming the exact problem you found, with the exact URL and the position of the dead link. Save the webmaster a search.
- 2. The brief diagnosis.** One sentence noting that the destination URL is now returning a 404. No drama.
- 3. The match suggestion.** One sentence suggesting your 1:1 replacement as a possible fix, with the URL. Frame it as a casual alternative, not a requirement.
- 4. The graceful close.** Acknowledge they're busy and sign off without pressuring them to reply.

That's the entire email. 40 to 70 words. Nothing else.

A template you can run this week

Hi [Name], on your [topic] resource page at [URL], the link to [original destination] is currently returning a 404. The destination domain looks like it expired earlier this year. If you're looking for a fitting replacement, we published [your asset] at [URL] that covers the same [format and angle] the original did. Either way, thought it was worth flagging. Best, [Your name].

The template works because it's entirely focused on the webmaster's problem. The exact URL and position remove diagnostic work. The replacement suggestion sits inside a *casual* sentence framing rather than a demand. The close removes pressure.

The three-part non-pushy follow-up

Webmasters are busy and often miss your first email. A single well-crafted follow-up can double your conversion rate, but it has to remain polite. A non-pushy reminder includes three components: a clear reference to the original email so they don't have to search for context, an explicit assumption that they're simply busy rather than ignoring you, and a graceful exit stating that you won't bother them again after this message.

Two follow-ups is the absolute ceiling. Three burns the bridge and gets your address blacklisted on internal media databases that propagate across publications.

Building the Repeatable Reclamation Habit

A single reclamation campaign generates a clutch of placements. A monthly habit generates a compounding asset. The difference is the rhythm.

The pattern that holds up for solo operators and small teams alike is a recurring four-hour block on the first Friday of every month. The block contains four tasks in sequence. First, pull broken-backlink reports for three to five competitor domains. Second, vet the top 50 prospects against the four-criteria authority test. Third, identify the 5 to 10 dead pages worth building 1:1 replacements for, and assign each one to a content owner with a two-week build deadline. Fourth, send reclamation pitches against the existing replacement assets you already have on the shelf.

The output target is roughly 15 to 20 pitches sent per monthly block. At a 20% reply rate, you should see three to four placements land within four to six weeks. Half will be no-replies. A small percentage will be polite declines because the webmaster has already updated their page.

Common obstacles

You'll hit two predictable obstacles in the first three months.

The first is replacement-asset throughput. Building 1:1-matched content costs real time. The fix is to keep a rolling backlog of

replacement assets that match the kinds of broken links you keep finding. After the third or fourth monthly run, patterns emerge. Industry calculators die a lot. Round-up posts get culled in site migrations. Tool comparison pages get archived. Once you know which formats your industry sheds, you can build the replacement bank in advance.

The second is conversion variance. Some months you'll pitch 15 and land 6 placements. Variance is normal at this volume: a one-placement month often follows a six-placement month. Avoid the temptation to change the play after a slow stretch. Hold the rhythm and the average regresses to the documented 20% reply rate over a quarter.

Final Words

CONCLUSION

Broken-link reclamation is the most reliable, lowest-resistance link acquisition play in the modern web. It works because the asymmetry favours you: webmasters need their pages clean, the supply of dead links is effectively infinite, and a well-vetted 1:1 match removes their work rather than creating more of it.

The play stops working the moment you cut corners on the 1:1 Match Rule. A blog post can't replace a calculator. Swap a 4,000-word reference guide for a 600-word checklist and the webmaster spots the gap immediately. Substitute a generic round-up for an expert-authored explainer, and the pitch converts at cold-outreach rates. Equivalence is the rule. Build the replacement asset properly or move on to a different target.

Run the play once and it'll feel like work for a modest return. Run it every first Friday for six months and the placements compound. Editors who swap one of your links once will swap a second one faster the next time you show up. The relationships you build through quiet, useful audits outlast every algorithm update.

Start with the first competitor report. Move to the first 1:1 match. Send the first pitch. The compounding starts the day you do.

Implementation Checklist

Complete each item this week.

- ☐ Pick three direct competitors whose link profiles match the one you want. Save the URLs in a single document.
- ☐ Pull a broken-backlinks report for each competitor in Ahrefs, Semrush, or Moz. Export the list to a spreadsheet.
- ☐ Sort by referring domains. Keep only the dead pages with 10 or more inbound links.
- ☐ Apply the four-criteria authority test (topical relevance, organic traffic, contextual placement, editorial discretion) to the top 30 referring domains. Cut anything that fails.
- ☐ For each surviving target, open the original dead page in the Wayback Machine. Capture the format, depth, and audience the original served. Write the brief for the 1:1 match in one paragraph.
- ☐ Pick the single highest-value dead page on the list. Build a 1:1-matched replacement asset within two weeks.
- ☐ Send the value-upfront pitch to the top 10 referring domains pointing at that dead page. Use the four-component template. 40 to 70 words per email.

- ☐ Send one polite follow-up 48 hours after the original. Two follow-ups is the absolute ceiling.
- ☐ Block the first Friday of next month on your calendar as a recurring four-hour Reclamation Audit.
- ☐ Track three numbers per cycle: pitches sent, replies received, links placed. Compare against the 20% benchmark every quarter.